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ABSTRACT

One of the problems one encounters in attempting to learn about another culture is the possible distortion brought about by one's own cultural biases. The overall purpose of this unit is to help students understand perceptions: how they can differ and how cultural biases are acquired and transmitted. Indian culture is an appropriate vehicle for this examination because it is a culture little known in U.S. society and a country with which many in the United States anticipate closer ties. The lesson's seven objectives are to enable students to: (1) understand the concept of perception; (2) become aware of cultural biases; (3) understand how cultural biases are transmitted; (4) compare common perceptions of India about the United States and the United States about Indians; (5) understand the perception of India transmitted throughout U.S. culture by the mass media; (6) understand that the U.S. and India share common values; and (7) gain exposure to a realistic view of contemporary Indian life. Six class activities are outlined concerning or involving: (1) visual perception; (2) Indian perceptions of people in the United States; (3) perception and the mass media; (4) proverbs, quotes: another way of perceiving culture; (5) views of contemporary India (through film, video, or slides); and (6) an essay exercise. (DB)

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A UNIT ON PERCEPTION: INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

One of the problems one encounters in attempting to learn about another culture is the possible distortion brought about by one's own personal view and preconceived attitudes acquired from one's social environment. As a result, we know little about other countries and are incompetent to relate to them. This lack of understanding has led us to make decisions and judgements based on ignorance rather than information.

The overall purpose of this unit will be to help students understand perceptions: how they can differ and how cultural biases are acquired and transmitted. The student will be better able to analyze their origin and question their reliability.

India is a suitable vehicle for this examination since it is a culture so little known in our society. It is also a culture with which many in the U. S. anticipate closer ties.

OBJECTIVES

1. The student will understand the concept of perception.

2. The student will become aware of cultural biases.

3. The student will understand how cultural biases are transmitted.

4. The student will compare common perceptions of Indians about Americans and Americans about Indians.

5. The student will understand the perception of India transmitted throughout our culture by the mass media.

6. The student will understand that the U. S. and India share common values.

7. The student will be exposed to a realistic view of contemporary Indian life.

ACTIVITY 1: VISUAL PERCEPTION

Objective: Study the concept of perception

Procedure:

- Distribute Handout #1 to students.
- Give them a few minutes to examine the handout.
- Discuss the different figures.

  Figure A:

  Stare at the center of this group of blocks. What do you see between the blocks? In the spaces between the squares, do you see black dots? How can you see things that do not really exist?

  Figure B:

  Do you see the young lady or the old woman? The young lady is facing away from you. Her nose and eyelash are barely visible. The young lady's chin and cheek are the old lady's nose. How can two people look at the same figure and see two different things?

  Figure C:

  Which inner dot seems larger? How can background change perception?

Culminating Discussion Topics: Perceptions

- Sometimes we don't "see what is directly in front of us." Our perceptions of reality can differ.
- We usually see what we see in the framework of our own experience or world view.
- It is difficult to change perception unless we want to.
- Each culture transmits its own world view. We need to understand ours in order to know how this can get in the way of perceiving the reality of other cultures.

HANDOUT #1

FIGURE A

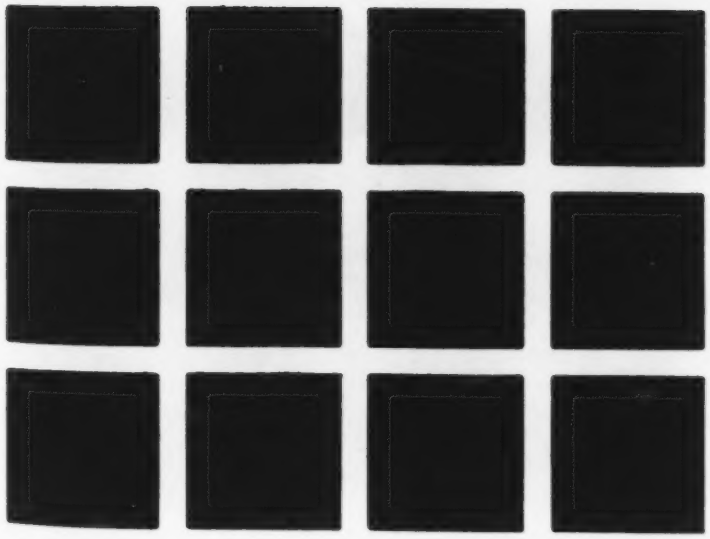
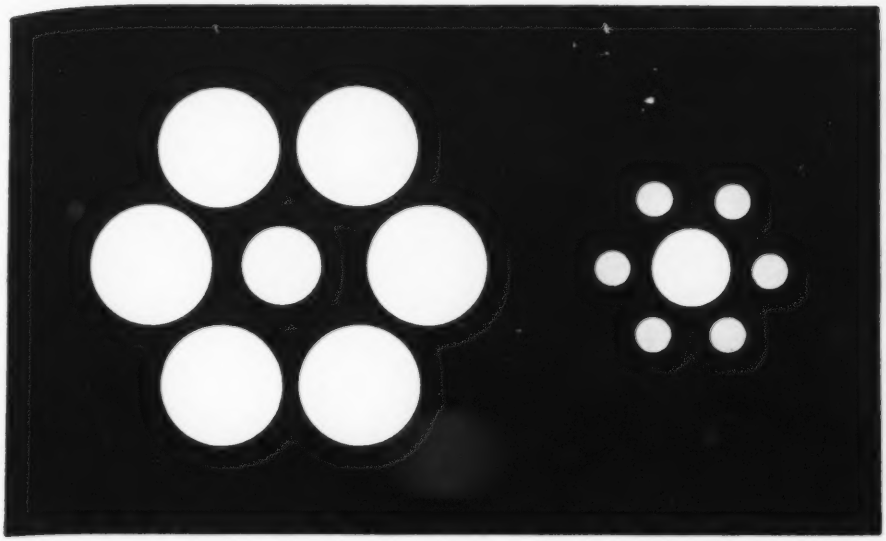


FIGURE B

FIGURE C



ACTIVITY 2: INDIAN PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICANS

Objective: Study the concept of cultural bias.

Procedure:

- Distribute Handout #2 to students.
- Explain that this is a list of terms used by Indians to describe Americans.
- Ask them to read the list and check those terms they believe to be accurate.
- In small groups, the students will choose the three most accurate terms and the three most inaccurate terms and the three most inaccurate terms. They must have reasons for their choices.
- In a large group, the students will explain their choices. They will discuss reasons why Indians would have the correct perceptions as well as misperceptions.
- Brainstorm lists of:
  - adjectives used by students to describe Indians
  - things students would expect to see if they went to India
- Discuss:
  - origin of these ideas
  - their degree of accuracy

HANDOUT #2

Terms used by Indians to describe Americans	Check terms you consider to be accurate
. affluent	
. progressive in science and technology	
. materialistic	
. self centered: don't know about others don't want to know about others	
. easily fooled or gullible	
. can't count, depend on calculators	
. poorly dressed, sloppy	
. eat canned or fast foods	
. independent children	
. schools too open; few barriers between teachers and students	
. students disrespectful	
. children self-centered: "Everything belongs to me."	
. bad, warlike: "They sell arms around the world."	
. contributed little to spiritual development of mankind	
. cares little for family: high divorce rate	
. don't care for their elderly	
. too much freedom has led to loss of morals	
. little depth of learning in the high schools	
. life is easier because of gadgets, machines	
. friendly, open, sociable	
. self-critical	
. enjoys life	

ACTIVITY 3: PERCEPTION AND THE MASS MEDIA

Objective: Explain the perception of India transmitted via news sources.

Procedure:

- Students or teacher will have located articles in current news magazines or newspapers that related to India.
- Using Handout #3, students are to analyze each article.
- Compile the information in class
- Discussion
    - Portrayal of India
    - Attitudes transmitted
    - News reporting
        - kind of information included
        - kind of information excluded
        - image developed
    - Procedure used to get a more balanced view of life in India

HANDOUT #3

Name of magazine or newspaper:

Title of article or headline:

Section and page number:

Date:

Summary of main issue presented:

Adjectives used to describe:

Attitude likely to be gained about India:

ACTIVITY #4: PROVERBS, QUOTES: ANOTHER WAY OF PERCEIVING CULTURE

Objective: Explore sampling of values from Indian culture and compare to those found in the U. S.

Procedure:

- Distribute Handout #4 to students
- Explain that the list contains statements by Indian leaders plus proverbs from unknown Indian sources that have been handed down from generation to generation. These offer us another way of looking at the values and beliefs held by a culture.
- Students are to read each proverb and either rewrite in their own words or explain what the proverb means.
- Discuss each proverb. What is the author trying to say? What is important to this author? Ask students to make generalizations about Indian values perceived from these sayings.
- Choose the proverbs that are most similar to American beliefs and those that are most different.

HANDOUT #4

PROVERBS	MEANING
Our deeds, good or evil, follow us like shadows. Buddha	
The end of all knowledge must be the building of character. Mahatma Gandhi	
You can't cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water. Tagore	
Nobody can be degraded except by his own actions. Indira Gandhi	
To live above the means befitting a poor country is to live on stolen food. Mahatma Gandhi	
Through dharma (duty), wealth and happiness are obtained. Punchatantra	
The fear of the judge within is more than the one without. Mahatma Gandhi	
The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for and deserted by everybody. Mother Teresa	
A man is but a product of his thoughts. What he thinks, that he becomes. Mahatma Gandhi	
It is the fellow who dances and jumps and strikes up a tune that the world pays attention to.	

When the eyes are closed, the world is dark.

Call on God, but now away from the rocks.

The buffalo belongs to the man with the big stick.

Philanthropy is true religion.

Man's life is ambition; woman's life is man.

If we have it we loath it; if we have it not, we long for it.

Plenty and discontent go hand in hand.

Do good, have good.

Why weep for gold when you have the tulip-tree?

By remembering our own faults, we forget others.

ACTIVITY #5: VIEW OF CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Objective: Gain a realistic perception of life in India.

Procedure:

- Show a film, video or slides that would reveal examples of life in contemporary India

- During the film have students make two lists:

Perceptions I had about India that were reinforced	Perceptions of India that are new to me.

- Discussion: how have your perceptions of India been reinforced or changed?

ACTIVITY #6: ESSAY

Objective: Evaluation

Procedure: In an essay, students are to respond to the following quote by Prime Minister Nehru:

> "India contains all that is disgusting and all that is noble. You take your choice."

Alternate or follow-up activities:

1. Establish pen pal relationships between your students and Indian students.

2. Invite guest speakers from the local Indian community to speak to your class.

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